



FIGHTING HER INNER DEMONS

A one-act play featuring Shabana Azmi explores identity, fame and the hegemony of language

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When actor-director-playwright Girish Karnad wrote the Kannada play *Odakalu Bimba* in 2005, he directed it himself. More than a decade later, the play, translated into Hindi and English, has been performed across the country and abroad, and been directed by other theatre stalwarts.

This weekend, theatre personality Raell Padamsee's Mumbai-based company Ace Productions will bring the monodrama (a play with a single actor) to the city.

Directed by Raell's father, adman and theatre personality Alyque Padamsee, for whom Karnad had translated the play into English, *Broken Images* features film and theatre actor Shabana Azmi. The play was first staged in 2009, and has been performed in Delhi before. "In all the places where we have staged it, it has done inordinately well," says Raell.

While many of Karnad's plays use history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues, *Broken Images* has a more modern approach. The play captures the inner turmoil of Manjula Nayak, a not-so-successful Hindi short-story writer, who is suddenly catapulted to stardom after writing an English novel. But Manjula worries about whether she has achieved success at the cost of her ideals and her Hindi readership. One day her own image turns inquisitor, putting her on trial for what she did. But is it her own image or



■ Theatre director Alyque Padamsee hopes his play will prompt audiences to think

that of her look-alike younger sister, who died just before the book was published? Is there something else troubling Manjula's conscience other than her simply abandoning Hindi for success? "I have directed over 70 full-length plays," recalls director Alyque Padamsee. "And the first thing that had struck me about this play was how on earth could the audience accept two characters who look the same, one the image of another, on stage. There have been plays with characters having split personalities, such as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, but this was different. And I said, let's do it."

"I wanted an actor who is more identified with Hindi theatre or films, rather than English theatre. I had only one name in mind and that was of Shabana Azmi," says the director. Alyque recalls that before the play was staged for the first time, the director and the actor spent about two-and-a-half to three months discussing the characters.

"But I have never got a clear answer

THE PLAY CAPTURES THE MENTAL TURMOIL OF HINDI WRITER MANJULA NAYAK, WHO BECOMES FAMOUS AFTER WRITING AN ENGLISH NOVEL

either from Girish or Alyque, that of the two sisters, with whom does our sympathy lie?" says Shabana. "So I go by the audience reaction and with whom I am empathising on a particular day." The other thing that Shabana finds quite challenging is that it is a highly technical play.

"It is me against a televised image of myself. The timing has to be perfect because the televised image will just go by its own rhythm," she explains.

Of course, that hasn't stopped the actor from improvising on stage. "Once when we were staging the show in Rohtak, the organisers came to me half-an-hour before the show was to start and said that since most people in the audience didn't understand English, could I do a bit in Hindi? So I went in and I was translating the dialogues in Hindi in my mind and speaking them, while the televised image said the lines in English. It made the play more accessible to that audience, but it is an experience I will never get over in my life," she says.

Alyque sums up what the audience should expect from *Broken Images*: "Theatre is not only about entertainment. It should also make audiences do a bit of soul searching. This is one play that does exactly that."

■ Shabana Azmi plays a character whose image becomes her inquisitor

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THE MANY TALES OF PREMCHAND

This weekend, two of the legendary writer's stories will be staged, even as his 136th birthday comes up later this month



■ Actors rehearse the play based on Premchand's short story, *Beton Wali Widhwa*

PHOTO: SAUMYA KHANDELWAL/HT

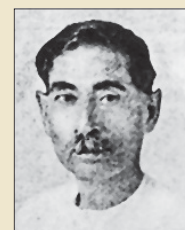
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For a story written about a century ago, Munshi Premchand's *Beton Wali Widhwa* could well have been a modern-day tale. The story of Phoolmati, a widow, who goes through a loss of status, power and respect after the death of her husband, *Beton Wali Widhwa* is a critique of the status of women in a patriarchal household, and their lack of access to property.

Dramatist Ravi Raj Sagar of the city-based amateur theatre artists' group Dramatech, says he chose to dramatise *Beton Wali Widhwa* and Panch Parmeshwar from Munshi Premchand's repertoire of 300 short stories because of the inherent social message in these works. Today, Ravi's group will be staging Panch Parmeshwar, a story of two close friends and their tryst with justice, and on Sunday, *Beton Wali Widhwa*.

"Premchand has fascinated dramatists for many years now. But I picked these two stories because they are among his lesser known works," says Ravi, adding that these set of performances, collectively titled 'Marmik Premchand', are being staged close to the legendary Hindi litterateur's 136th birthday that comes up on July 31.

The director, who has been a corporate professional and done theatre on the side for over three decades, says that in the past, he has staged some of Premchand's well-known stories such as *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, *Nimantran*, and *Do Bailon ki Katha*, which were particularly targeted at families and children. "Those plays had elements of wit and satire. But these stories are more



■ Munshi Premchand's stories were a critique of prevailing social evils

grim and touching. Panch Parmeshwar, for instance, is about concepts of justice, and fairplay; a precursor to our modern-day justice system of courts," he says.

In the dramatisation of the stories, Ravi says that he has tried to retain the flavour and the "timeless" feel of the stories, right down to the dialogue. "What worked was that these stories had enough dialogue; too much narration, and the audience gets bored and one needs to innovate with the role of the sutradhar. In one of our earlier performances of *Do Bailon ki Katha*, we used children as narrators," says Ravi.

Ravi says that he has always been fascinated by Premchand's command over language, his choice of words, some of which were the writer's own creations — for instance, the word "matek" or "consensus" in Panch Parmeshwar had been devised by the writer himself. Which is why the director says he has ensured that the actors speak Premchand's language — a mix of Hindi, Awadhi and Urdu. "These plays are aimed at literature connoisseurs, but one hopes that they will appeal to a wider audience too," says Ravi.

(The plays will be screened at 7 pm on July 16 & 17 at Shri Ram Centre, Mandi House. Tickets @bookmyshow.com)



■ A scene from Dramatech's previous production, *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*

PICK OF THE WEEK

CINEMA FROM IRAN

As part of a cultural exchange programme, the Directorate of Film Festivals in collaboration with Iran Cultural House, New Delhi, is organising an Iranian film festival. Over the next four days, 14 films will be screened, including the works of contemporary filmmakers such as Reza Mirkarimi, Narges Abyar and Ehsan Abdipour.

10.30am-7.30pm, July 16-19th. Siri Fort Auditorium, New Delhi. Call: 26499371



WORKSHOP ON SELFIES

Does the 'selfie' owe its historical origin to the art of self-portraiture? How has technology fast-forwarded the selfie phenomenon? Interesting questions such as these will be answered at a day-long photography workshop, conducted by photographer Parthiv Shah under the aegis of Habitat Photosphere, the year-long photography festival initiated by India Habitat Centre.

11am-5pm. Today, India Habitat Centre, Lodi Road. Call: 43662024.



M F HUSAIN/PHOTO: PARTHIV SHAH

A MUSICAL TRIBUTE

Join in this tribute to qawwali legend Amjad Sabri (below), who was murdered in Karachi last month. The 45-year-old singer belonged to the famous Sabri Brothers — Ghulam Fareed Sabri & Maqbool Sabri. The two-and-a-half-hour long musical tribute will feature Sufi singers like Sufi Hayat Brothers (Hamsar Hayat Nizami and brothers) and Sabri Sufi Brothers (Haji Iqbalshah Sabri, Dilshad Sabri and Irshad Sabri).

7pm, Kamani Auditorium, Copernicus Marg, Mandi House, New Delhi. Tickets @ delhievents.com



WORKS OF HIMMAT SHAH

Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) is presenting a comprehensive show of eminent artist Himmat Shah (1957 to 2015). There are around 300 works including terracotta sculptures, bronzes, and drawings, as well as high-relief murals, burnt paper collages and silver paintings.

10.30-6.30 pm, July 20. Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, 145, DLF South Court Mall, Saket, New Delhi.

DESIGNS OF LE CORBUSIER

The Play of Light: Le Corbusier in India presents a photographic tribute to the master architect on his 50th death anniversary. The exhibition showcases the works of documentary photographer Ajay Bhatia, taken mostly in Chandigarh, the city designed by Le Corbusier. Other images include that of the Mill Owners' Association Building in Ahmedabad. In Chandigarh, the photographer focuses on the Capitol Complex.

11 am - 8pm. Till July 26. Galerie Romain Rolland, Alliance Francaise de Delhi, Lodi Estate, New Delhi.

